Founders Classical Academy of Rogers

Five Vital Reasons Why Liberty and Freedom Took Root in Colonial America during the 1600s and 1700s

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Abstract

Liberty and freedom became foundational values in American society during the 1600s and 1700s, ultimately leading to the creation of the U.S. Constitution and an innovative form of government that has endured for nearly 250 years. Five key factors contributed to this development. First, religious freedom motivated individuals to migrate to America, providing the moral foundation necessary to resist tyranny and promote self-governance. Second, critical legal advancements enabled colonists to legislate based on natural law principles. Third, an emerging economic culture fostered a free enterprise system that supported independence. Fourth, a cultural emphasis on education—particularly in biblical and classical studies—equipped individuals with knowledge of their religion, their inherent God-given rights, and the laws of their mother country. Finally, these elements cultivated exceptional statesmanship and leadership, allowing colonists to challenge a global superpower and construct a novel system of governance. Collectively, these factors made liberty and freedom attainable in America and propelled the formation of the U.S. Constitution.

Introduction: American Definitions of Liberty and Freedom

A remarkable process unfolded on the eastern seaboard of the North American continent during the 1600s and 1700s. People gained tremendous personal liberties and eventually more permanent freedoms due to the development of a new government structure in 1787 with the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. What occurred to make this possible? We will answer this question as we highlight the process and culture of liberty and freedom that led to the founding of the United States of America.

First, it's important to understand how the people of Colonial America defined liberty and freedom. Noah Webster, played a vital role as a founding father in spreading doctrines of freedom and creating the uniqueness of American English to suit the minds of this new American people, was critical in making America a successful and sovereign nation. He spent countless hours crafting the first American dictionary. His dictionary reflected the great minds of the founding generation in America.

In Webster's original American Dictionary of the English Language, freedom is defined as "particular privileges; franchise; immunity; as the *freedom* of a city….power of enjoying franchises" (Webster, 1989, Vol.1 p.87). If one then reads Webster's definition of franchise one learns that a franchise is "a particular privilege or right granted by a prince or sovereign to an individual or to a number of persons; as the right to be a body corporate with perpetual succession; the right to hold a court leet or other court; to have waifs, wrecks, treasure-treve, or forfeitures. So the right to vote for governor, senators and representatives, is a *franchise* belonging to citizens, and not enjoyed by aliens. The right to establish a bank, is a *franchise"* (Webster, 1989, Vol. I p.87).

To analyze Webster's meaning, we must understand that freedom is the preservation of privileges or rights in a government or corporate structure that has been organized for the benefit of its citizens or members. The legal power of these organizations to form and function are referred to as franchises. These franchises are granted or given to the people who seek

their benefits to legally organize to preserve in perpetuity the rights of the citizens or members. Webster points out that this is done by legal means through the sovereign authority.

To put this idea into modern verbiage, *freedom is an environmental condition sustained by the legal structure of a government or corporate organization*.The ability of man to act for himself under the societal or governmental condition of freedom is where we next come to the definition of liberty.

Noah Webster defines liberty when he writes, “natural liberty consists in the power of acting as one thinks fit, without any restraint or control, except from the laws of nature. It is a state of exemption from the control of others, and from positive laws and the institutions of social life. This *liberty* is abridged by the establishment of government” (Webster, 1989, Vol. II, p.6).

Restated, *Liberty is the free exercise of an individual's actions based on his own choices without restrictions from an outside force.* The purpose of good government is to allow individuals to be self governing and to have accountability for their own actions when they exercise their liberties.

Interestingly, Webster frankly states that some liberty is lost when a franchise is issued and a government of some order is put in place. Citizens have to surrender some liberties to enjoy the safety and protection that a government affords. They take this risk because they hope that their natural rights will be preserved for a much longer period of time and will benefit their posterity over many generations. Another reason for the undertaking of this risk is the benefits of security, economic prosperity, and lawful order that comes from an established government where the people can be secure in their personal property and can buy, sell, and trade under a standard system that creates marketplace efficiencies unhampered by criminal activity or the restrictions of other nations. These natural rights put in place by nature and nature’s God give man agency to act for themselves and not to have their actions limited by a

king, emperor, chairman or dictator. The accountability of each person's individual actions is drastically reduced under such a controlling regime as they severely restrict individual liberties and demand legal adherence by their subjects to specific beliefs formed around their favorite ideologies. As this has been the well-documented and common experience of mankind for thousands of years, it explains why well-read Colonial Americans were willing to give up some of their liberties so they could have a strong form of federalist government that would protect their liberties for a long time to come.

Constitutional scholar Oliver DeMille underscores Webster's classic definitions and points out that freedom helps us obtain more of those things that are good, fulfilling both our needs and wants. The ability to improve our lives by our choices is liberty and when liberty is granted protections to operate under a society or government arrangement, then that is called freedom. Both liberty and freedom are necessary for progress in a society and for the people to fully pursue life and happiness (DeMille, 2015, 12-13).

There are five main reasons why first liberty and then freedom became the most important values in American society during the 1600s and 1700s and led to the creation of the U.S. Constitution and the successful rollout of an innovative new form of government that has performed well for almost 250 years.

Reason 1: American Religious Freedom

The American Colonies were set up by groups who sought religious freedom to operate churches differently from those required by the King's law. The Church of England was the religious affiliation required for all citizens of England. In America, initially there was no government oversight of religious practices. These religious groups fled England seeking to govern themselves according to the minds of their members, which allowed them to interpret the

Bible and practice their faith in a way that seemed in harmony with the writings of the prophets, rather than dictated by the current king.

The first group to leave England was a set of Christian saints whom we now call pilgrims, who wanted a complete separation from the Church of England in order to worship God in their own manner. Realizing that the Mayflower ship had missed its intended destination and had not landed them in the charter of Virginia, the pilgrims formed what is called the Mayflower Compact, an agreement to operate as a society under covenant to be obedient to the laws that would soon be set up. This was a bold experiment in self-government where a government was set up to be just and equal for all. Ironically, the pilgrims mentioned in the compact that they were doing this for the honor and benefit of their King James back in England, the very tyrant who's persecution they were seeking to escape (Bennett, 2006, 38). One might reason that the pilgrims did this because they recognized the king as the generous grantor of their charter of land and the purveyor of the King James Version of the Bible from which they now enjoyed such great knowledge. As such, not wanting to anger the king any further, they decided to speak well of their enemy even despite the fact that they had landed in a different area altogether and had a massive ocean between them and the Monarchical "defender of the faith" (Bennett, 2006, 37).

After the small pilgrim migration, the Puritan exodus out of England brought 200 ships carrying about 20,000 people to settle in the Boston area. Their object was to reform the Church of England (Johnson, 1999, 31). The only way to do that and be free from the oppressions of the King was to put an ocean between them and England. John Winthrop, one of the great American Puritan leaders, compared the Puritan exodus to Moses leading the children of Israel out of bondage from Egypt to the Promised Land (Johnson, 1999, 32). It was King Charles I, whom they likened to the Pharaoh of Moses's time, that persecuted the Puritans and shut down parliament on March, 2nd 1629. The Puritans had, until then, a voice in parliament to express their concerns. Twelve days later King Charles I granted a royal charter to the Puritans to settle

in America which motivated many of the powerful and well educated Puritans to stop trying to reform the English government and to flee to a place where they could worship according to the extrusions of their own conscience (Ammerman & Howard, 2022).

Soon after, William Penn led the Religious Society of Friends, later known as the Quakers, to America. He had received a large land grant from the King of England who was paying him and his father back in part for a debt that was owed. Penn, with that land grant, started Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love, where believers from different Christian persuasions would be free to worship how they desired without fear of persecution. Philadelphia soon became the largest and most prosperous city in America. This desire by the people for the liberty to worship as they please, and Penn's desire for religious tolerance, helped grow the culture of the city to the point that it became host to the Constitutional Convention in the summer of 1787.

These groups sought religious freedom in America because they saw the discrepancies between what the state church was declaring legal and what they read about natural law or God's eternal law in the Bible and from the Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke. Interestingly, this same challenge is threatening freedom in America in more modern times. The great moralist and Russian author, Alesandr Solzhenitsyn, pointed out in a speech that Americans are more concerned about what is legal than what is right (DeMille, 2013, 131). The conscience of these religious groups was seared by the realization that they were, in many cases, ignoring natural law to do what the strongest in society declared was the right thing to do. They recognized for themselves what Saint Thomas Aquinas taught when he said, "The natural law is nothing else than the rational creature's participation in the eternal law (DeMille, 2013, 131)."

These rational creatures sought a type of government that would preserve their natural rights and secure natural law as the source of authority for the government and the people.

They were concerned about doing the right thing and not just being in good legal standing with the authorities. This collective moral conscience was a fertile field for long term freedom in America.

Reason 2: American Legal Freedom

From the beginning, the American people chose God as their legal Sovereign. They trusted in God and based their new form of government on the authority of God, not on the authority of the king or parliament. The Founding Fathers of America stated that their right to form a new government is based on their natural rights under the Laws of God. They wanted a government that would preserve those rights for posterity indefinitely.

The Puritans are a great example of pursuing both religious and legal freedom. From a religious standpoint they sought to purify the Church of England, aiming to remove any resemblance to the Catholic Church. However, as persecution intensified under King Charles I, they decided to transfer their charter for the Massachusetts Bay Company to America in pursuit of independence from the crown. Once in America, their governor, John Winthrop, expanded voting rights for the General Court legislature to include all adult male church members. This was a bold step toward greater participation in the legal process of their newly established government (Bennett, 2006, 40, 41). The Puritans sought to preserve religious freedom by expanding legal freedom to allow more people to participate in their government and to vote for representatives. This was one of the first transfers of legal power to the people. Johnson sheds further light on how Americans captured legal freedom in the colonies:

> “The Fundamental Orders of Connecticut (1639) was the first written constitution not only in America but in the world. Written constitutions were subsequently adopted by all the colonies. It is vital to grasp this point. It was the constitutions as much as the assemblies

> themselves which made the colonies unique. In this respect they could be seen as more 'modern' than England, certainly more innovatory" (Johnson, 1999, 105).

Constitutions were a new innovation that changed the way colonists viewed their position in the world and to the crown. Constitutions made Americans believe in their independence, self-reliance, and develop laws to govern their new government. Johnson explains this phenomenon:

> "Having a constitution made a colony feel self-contained, mature, almost sovereign. Having a constitution inevitably led you to think in terms of rights, natural law, and absolutes, things the English were conditioned by their empiricism and their organic approach to change, not to trouble their heads about" (Johnson, 1999, 105).

Another key legal development in the colonies was the addition of assemblies that council and legislate on local issues with their Royal governors appointed by the king (Johnson, 1999, 104). The governor's council was one of these assemblies which resemble in some ways the House of Lords back in London. Americans also created lower assemblies, referred to as the House of Burgesses, which resembled the House of Commons in Parliament. It was these Houses of Burgesses that gave power to the people and even rivaled the governors in their power as the American Revolution became a reality. Johnson goes on to explain how both assemblies and constitutions played key roles in expanding legal authority to the colonist:

> "The early establishment of assemblies and written constitutions–self-rule in fact–arose from the crown's physical inability, in the first half of the 17th century, to exercise direct control. The crown was never able to recover this surrender of power. Nor could the English deny the Americans the fruit of their own past" (Johnson, 1999, 105).

Later on, American colonists took a firm line on the Stamp Act, recognizing that their natural rights had been violated. They believed that they should not have taxation without representation and since it was not practical to send delegates or send or receive messages to England in a timely manner they demanded that only the colonial legislatures had the right to tax the colonists (Bennett, 2006, 66). Many colonial Houses of Burgesses passed resolutions against the Stamp Act, calling it unconstitutional. For example, after Patrick Henry's compelling speech naming five resolutions against the enforcement of the Stamp Act, the Virginia House of Burgesses quickly passed those resolutions into law. These delegates knew English law as written in the Petition of Right, and the Magna Carta, and that knowledge gave them courage to proclaim that representatives should be selected from their own number (Bennett, 2006, 64,66).

John Adams, reflecting on the events involving the Stamp Act in 1765, said, "the most remarkable year of my life. The enormous engine fabricated by the British Parliament for battering down all the rights and liberties of America…has raised through the whole continent a spirit that will be recorded to our honor with all future generations" (Bennett, 2006, 67).

As we can see, Colonists took upon themselves the right to self governance under the natural rights of God's law. They did this by electing delegates to represent them in legislative assemblies in all the 13 colonies. Additionally, they did this by encouraging their assemblies to pass constitutions to give their new governments laws to operate by and to help preserve the natural rights of the colonists.

Reason 3: American Economic Freedom

American colonists continued to fight for a free enterprise system during the 1600s and 1700s. It was the free enterprise system's economic muscle that gave rise to a new form of republican government. They deeply resented any interference or meddling from the government in their business dealings. They clearly recognized that a free enterprise system brought them prosperity and freedom. How did the colonists define free enterprise? Free enterprise is:

> "A system where the law encourages market forces and gives no special preferences; it protects equal rights for all individuals and entities and leaves initiative and enterprise to private individuals, groups, businesses and organizations that are all treated equally and with minimal legislation by the legal code…" (DeMille, 2015, 49)

Economic freedom is best secured through free enterprise and is essential for obtaining and maintaining legal freedom in a country. In his book, *1776*, historian David McCullough points out that "the Americans of 1776 enjoyed a higher standard of living than any people in the world." He notes that the Hessian and British troops were surprised to find the people living in such great wealth when they landed on Long Island, New York (McCullough, 2006, 158). Amazingly, many Hessian troops captured by Washington after crossing the Delaware River in The Battle of Trenton later settled in Pennsylvania. One could easily reason that the high level of prosperity and freedom in America is what inspired the Hessian troops not to return to Germany. Economists Lindert and Williamson found that per capita income in the American colonies actually began to exceed that of Great Britain as early as 1700 and could have even exceeded it as early as 1690 (Lindert & Williamson, 2014). Scott Miller, like Lindert and Williamson, pulls data from historian Alice Hanson Jones that states the average income per capita in the colonies in 1774 on the eve of the revolution was £13.85 per year. Incomes in the southern colonies were the highest with some reaching £18 per year. In Great Britain, the

average income per capita was £10-12 per year. Miller also identifies that taxes were very low in the colonies with the average at 1-1.5% compared to Great Britain's average between 5-7% (Miller, 2025). Having high average income and low taxes would have allowed colonial Americans to spend more on their needs, creating less worry about providing for themselves, and freeing them up to exercise additional personal liberties such as buying and reading a newspaper to keep up on current events, holding local governmental offices, and taking time to vote for delegates in their colony's House of Burgesses.

This wealth is what enabled the people to provide for an organized government and an organized standing army as resistance to the imperial forces of Great Britain. Many of the great leaders of the American Colonies, such as George Washington, came from Virgina, which was the wealthiest of the colonies due primarily to large agriculture enterprises (McCullough, 2006, 46-47,50). The wealth that came primarily from land and agriculture permitted time to be spent in education efforts, military efforts, and government building pursuits.

Oliver DeMille in his book, *We Hold These Truths to be Self Evident*, states that "The actual level of freedom and prosperity in any society is directly equivalent to the level of free enterprise" (DeMille, 2013, 105). Adam Smith, founder of the field of economics, discussed at great length in his seminal work, *Wealth of Nations,* Book IV, Chapter 7 that the reason the American Colonies have made such rapid progress is found in the freedom they have to pursue economic activity without interference from the government. He elaborates by explaining that the availability of land to every man to cultivate food for himself and to sell his surplus as he pleases has been the key to the rise in wealth (Smith & Fleischacker, 2018). The British Empire, on the other hand, had for many centuries limited the use of land into the hands of the few who had titles of nobility, which led to the minimization of wealth among the general populace who were not part of the aristocracy.

It is important to point out that the Founding Fathers were strongly in favor of free enterprise, and that it varies greatly from systems of economy that existed in the world during the time of the American Colonies. The free enterprise system the founders intended is very different from our current system here in the United States and in almost all countries around the globe. DeMille lists four other types of economic systems outside of free enterprise, namely mercantilism, corporatism, keynesianism, and capitalism (DeMille, 2015, 48). To give some perspective on our economic system today in relation to what used to be in Colonial America I would argue that we are a blend of capitalism, Keynesianism and corporatism today–certainly not a free enterprise system. We have moved away from a free market economy and have become more of a command economy in many sectors, very socialist in nature, with the government intervening at will into economic activities with no other reason than to promote an agenda or secure more power. It is also important to note that Mercantilism was the common form of economic activity under the British Empire, particularly in relation to its colonies and dominions. Colonists were aware that Mercantilism only benefited the few and not the many.

Like many of his founding colleagues, Jefferson was a highly productive person who engaged in a variety of free enterprise pursuits which we marvel over, even today. To emphasize the need for free enterprise, Thomas Jefferson said,

> "--with all these blessings [blessings of a new government with natural rights for its citizens], what more is necessary to make us a happy and a prosperous people? Still one thing more, fellow citizens–a wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, *shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned.* This is the sum of good government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities" (Jefferson, 1984, 494, emphasis added).

Jefferson would have agreed with DeMille when he wrote, “No nation on earth has maintained freedom at a level deeper than that understood by the regular citizens in the society. And note that few things are more essential for free people than clearly understanding what type of economic system they want” (DeMille, 2015, 51).

The American colonists knew from almost 200 years of experience that they prospered when left to pursue their own economic interests without any outside force influencing how they conducted business. As stated in Federalist 12, “The prosperity of commerce is now perceived and acknowledged by all enlightened statesmen to be the most useful sources of national wealth…” (DeMille, 2015, 80).

The primary economic lesson is this: if people have ample land and food, they are free to engage in other pursuits such as manufacturing textiles, furniture, homes, ships, tools, weapons, wagons and other goods. Economic success with land and agriculture also enables citizens to have time to pursue learning, to serve in the community, and to pursue new entrepreneurial inventions for the benefit of society. In the case of the colonists, economic success without doubt, left them with time to think of better forms of government that would serve them well.

Reason 4: American Educational Freedom

Two critical factors in the success of the American Revolution were the exceptional education of the American Founders, and a high level of educational achievement among most ordinary citizens. One indicator of this was literacy rates. For example, it is estimated that in New England, 90% of men and about 40% of women knew how to read. Many organizations such as the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Redwood Library, the Charleston Library Society, and the New York Library Society all existed to help private citizens obtain books and to help them develop their private collections (Encyclopedia.com, 2025). Even Americans who

couldn't afford a collection of books almost always had a copy of the Bible and an almanac in their homes (Encyclopedia.com, 2025). Not only did Americans own Bibles, but they read it deeply, lived by its teachings, and knew how to pull true principles from its text to create new government constitutions that supported human rights and freedom for all (DeMille, 2014, 44-49).

The famed Enlightenment thinker, Edmund Burke, even told the British Parliament that the reason Americans were staging a revolution was because they understood the law. He went on to say that Americans read the great classics and that is why they could see through the faulty reasoning of a tyrant (DeMille, 2013, 10). Ordinary workers, farmers and everyday citizens at the time The Constitution was being formed "clearly understood the deep and complex details of The Federalist and The Anti-Federalist Papers…" (DeMille, 2014, 19).

How did this high level of education come about for the ordinary person? It came from a religious desire to always be found in favor of God and His teachings. For example, the Puritans started Boston. Boston's size made it possible to start the first university for the purpose of teaching God's word and learning the ancient languages of Latin and Greek so that the Bible could be read in some of its original translations. The Puritans established Harvard University in 1636 (Bennett, 2006, 41). In the words of historian William J. Bennett, "It would be Harvard's responsibility to transmit these holy truths to the rising generation. Thus, Harvard's motto—Veritas (Truth) — meant the truth of salvation that sets men free" (Bennett, 2006, 41).

In 1647, the education of the ordinary person went beyond Harvard University when the Massachusetts General Court canonized the Old Deluder Law, which required townships of 50 or more families to hire a tutor to train the children to learn reading and writing. The law went further by requiring towns of a hundred or more families to sponsor a grammar school (Bennett, 2006, 41,42). From the very beginning, Americans have made education a key factor in their

lives, helping them to embrace the principles of life and salvation, enabling and motivating them to be self-governing so that they might serve God.

Founding Father John Adams recognized that our form of government was not capable of functioning correctly unless it governed a people who were religious and moral when he said the following to the Massachusetts Militia in 1798,

> "Because We have no Government armed with Power capable of contending with human Passions unbridled by morality and Religion. Avarice, Ambition, Revenge or Gallantry, would break the strongest Cords of our Constitution as a Whale goes through a Net. *Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people*. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other" (Waite, 2023).

The Magna Carta, The Mayflower Compact, The Declaration of Independence, The Articles of Confederation, and The Constitution all have a running theme in them of human agency and the accountability of each citizen to make their own choices and to be willing to answer to the consequences of their own decisions. They could no longer blame their bad decisions on a king or tyrant. As history teaches, all societies decline morally unless checked by faith in God, religious observance, and a desire to revive moral ethics in all sectors of society. If a declining society will not make those corrections, that society will eventually be destroyed.

Life in Colonial America reflected a tremendous value in education at home and in formal institutions of learning. It was expected that learning how to read and write would be the foundation of that education. Colonists valued the Bible and its Christian teachings. They valued reading the great classics from the Greeks, the Romans, and from the Enlightenment period. This culture of learning is what enabled the American Revolution.

Reason 5: Statesmanship: American Leadership for Freedom

The period of the 1600s and 1700s produced not only great personal liberty and widespread freedom but also produced some phenomenal individuals who played key roles in the development of a new powerful form of federalism as established in the U.S. Constitution. Federalism allowed for the strong unification of the American States so they could operate independently and make local decisions close to where the people lived. It also provided for a strong national government capable of international trade, securing treaties, declaring war and raising taxes to support the operations of the government. To properly lead this type of government, men well-educated in the classics were necessary to act as statesmen capable of leading the people in paths of liberty and freedom. These statesmen valued the principles of good government structures and were often quick to withdraw themselves from party politics, which they saw as being destructive to their new form of government. George Washington was the foremost to warn the people to avoid party activity, or factions, as they were called by the Founders. These great government leaders were also great moral leaders who knew that political science was not the answer but the study and application of effective government structures, natural law, and other principles of righteous leadership principles were the key to preserving both liberty and freedom.

DeMille talks about The Law of the Vital Few. The Law of the Vital Few states that there is a small section of society that is proactive in getting out and getting involved in improving society without waiting for the elite or the government to take action. Because of their legal, religious, educational training, these citizens rise up to take initiative on their own, to solve problems, and to create better pathways for their nation that perpetuate freedom and allow for more personal liberties” (DeMille, 2013, 89).

The Founding Fathers are an example of a group that complied with The Law of the Vital Few. Their efforts provided the momentum that lifted the rest of the American Colonies to a desire to start a better form of government, rather than continuing to submit to the tyrannical monarchical and parliamentary system of Great Britain, which were often at odds with each other.

For example, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay voluntarily published written articles explaining why a new system of federalism was necessary to unite the infantile and struggling United States of America. These articles became the famed Federalist Papers that won the debates for a strong federal government that could operate autonomously and solve the problems of the Articles of Confederation. The Federalist Papers helped convince the American people and their representatives that a new type of central government was indeed necessary. These men did this on their own volition because they saw the need. Though it would have been more convenient for them to pursue their own private interests at home, they put in the time, energy, and expense to pen and publish such works.

Another example of this is during the American Revolution, when Thomas Paine, traveled with George Washington and his troops. He lent help to the troops and penned inspirational words to rally their courage. His descriptions of troops' exertions to defend their rights helped garner support from ordinary Americans. Paine also gave moral and practical reasons why everyone should support the Revolution for the outcome of a free society. Paine wrote the highly influential pamphlets Common Sense and The American Crisis. General George Washington credited Paine with turning the tide of public opinion in favor of his army and the cause of independence (McCullough, 2006, 112). Paine did this of his own free will and desire to help the cause of liberty. He even moved from England to America at the encouragement of Benjamin Franklin, who generously wrote letters of recommendation to help

Paine get started in America on his arrival. Franklin must have seen some genius in the man that “moved the people” (Bennett, 2006, 81).

My third example is George Washington, who laid aside the comforts of his home and his ambitions as an innovative farmer to lead the Continental Army for eight long years. Historian Paul Johnson notes that Washington was not a great field commander, but he was the one who made it possible for a standing Army to be organized, trained, funded, and put into action. If he had not done this, it would not have been possible for Congress and 13 state governments to remain functioning, which permitted the people to carry an official face of independence to the British Army and King George (Johnson, 1999, 159,160). George Washington, if not a great general, was certainly a great leader.

David McCullough points out that Washington’s presence had a marvelous effect on people and they saw him as a leader, one who was distinguished from all the rest. He was one on whom they could depend for their success, and they felt bound in loyalty to him (McCullough, 2006, 43,44). Washington’s leadership was unmatched in the colonies, and after the war, he presided over the Continental Congress. James Madison believed the Continental Congress would not have happened without Washington’s support and presence. The love and admiration for Washington was so great that he was unanimously elected the first President of the United States. He brought great stability to an infant nation with a bold new form of government.

Thomas Jefferson famously referred to the Founding Fathers at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 as an “assembly of demigods” who would make “good and wise” decisions for the benefit of a struggling nation in its infancy (*An Assembly of Demigods*, 2020). Jefferson, one of the best educated, most influential, and most experienced of the Founding Fathers, was no doubt a fit judge to assess the collection of 55 men who assembled at Independence Hall in Philadelphia that hot and muggy summer of 1787.

It is clear that without the help of these key statesmen and others like them, the cause of independence and the establishment of the U.S. Constitution would have been impossible. Of their own free will, they played the role of government builders, for which they weren't always perfectly suited by natural talent. However, they were amply prepared to lead out among the people because of their training in law, in religion, in moral conduct, and in educational pursuits. These statesmen valued the principles of good government structures over the day to day functions of political positioning for power.

Having a well educated and moral leadership core of government and civic leaders is key to building liberty in all sectors of society and preserving freedom for the nation as a whole.

Conclusion: Building a People Capable of Freedom

Early Americans defined liberty as the ability to exercise personal actions of one's own free will and choice without interference from an outside force. They defined freedom as a condition of society or of the government that created an environment where individuals could exercise their liberties without interference or fear of punishment. These definitions of liberty and freedom took root in Colonial America, where Americans experienced great liberty from "freedom in the gaps" (DeMille, 2013, 71). These gaps occurred for a variety of reasons but the key gap was geography, as colonists pursued life in an outlying frontier area separated from the British Empire by the Atlantic Ocean. The technology of the time made traversing the Atlantic costly, dangerous, and time consuming.

Once Americans felt the tyrannical pinch by King George III, who felt it his duty in the 1760s and 1770s to compel the colonies to obedience, they were ready to declare independence and form a government that would ensure their natural rights and liberties through a new government structure (McCullough, 2006, 6).

This new government structure would not have been possible without people who were accustomed to worshiping God freely in their particular religious manner, making their own local laws, experiencing economic independence, pursuing rich educational experiences from a young age, and benefiting from great moral leadership .

As we look to the future, we would be wise to remember what brought us to success as a free nation, where the government protected individuals' right to pursue their liberties for their own benefit, by remembering the 1600s and 1700s of Colonial America. Freedom and liberty are essential because they are directly linked to our happiness (DeMille, 2015, 10). If we are to be happy people today, we should learn more about what preserves liberty and freedom from the lessons of the past.

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